

My name is Michael Thiessen. I was a pastor at Grace Baptist Church in Alliston, Ontario from June 2010 until August 2021. I stand before you today as one of the few pastors in Ontario who was charged for keeping our church open during the government lockdowns in Canada, 2020-2022. On Sundays when my entire church could have all met and shopped at Walmart together, I was charged up to \$300,000.00 and up to three years in jail for keeping our church open. The court is still deciding my case.

On December 26 2020, the Province of Ontario designated the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit as being in Stage 1 under the ReOpen Ontario Act, an Act which had been in place since July 25th 2020. In the Ontario Regulation 82/20 schedule 4, section 1, it imposed “gathering limits of 10 people for the purposes of a wedding, a funeral, or religious services.” This imposition and limitation stood in direct contravention of my religious convictions. The Ontario government's approach to mitigating COVID-19 made it clear that elected officials did not consider spiritual nourishment to be essential to human flourishing. As a Christian, I believe that humans have both bodies and souls, and each needs to be nourished. The Government ruled places of worship to be non-essential despite Churches in Canada taking serious cautionary measures regarding sanitization etc, and despite no known cases of COVID-19 transmission in a worship setting to date.

On January 10th 2021, I was charged with Failure to Comply with a continued section 7.0.2 Order. **On April 25th 2021**, I was charged again with Failure to Comply with a continued section 7.0.2 Order. Both of these charges were followed by a specific ORDER OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH to myself and my church family with the notice that “Failure to comply with this order is an offence under the Health Protection and Promotion Act for which you may be liable, on conviction, to a fine not more than \$5,000.00 for a person or not more than \$25,000.00 (for a corporation) for every day, or part of each day, on which the offence occurs or continues. These orders applied to “all administrators, visitors, and volunteers.” Furthermore, I was charged again on May 30th 2021, with another charge up to \$100,000.00 and up to a year, for “attending an organized public event or social gathering that is held outdoors, contrary to the Reopening Ontario Act.” The Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedom is representing me to fight these charges.

On January 7, 2022, Bill C-4 became part of the Criminal Code in Canada. The bill passed federal parliament and the senate with the support of all political parties and no opposition from any elected member of parliament. This bill, while purporting to protect individuals from coercion and abuse in the form of “conversion therapy,” will instead criminalize Christianity in our country. This bill’s wording is sufficiently broad to allow for the criminal prosecution of Christians who would speak biblical truth into the lives of those in bondage to sexual sins like homosexuality and transgenderism. If passed by the senate, even a mother or father who offers their children freedom from sexual sin through repentance and faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 6:9-11) could be threatened with five years in jail.

Most recently, I was just visited by local police **on March 24th, 2022**, to check that my family and I were not breaking a 14-day mandatory quarantine after returning from the United States. Even though our family is completely healthy, Under the Quarantine Act those who do not disclose their vaccination status upon return to Canada must quarantine: “Failure to comply with this order is an offence under the Quarantine Act and could lead to fines, imprisonment or both. Violating any instructions provided to you when you entered Canada is an offence under the Quarantine Act and could lead to up to: 6 months in prison and/or \$750,000 in fines.” The national and provincial regulations mandating vaccination passports limit and deny access to goods, services, businesses, public venues, and religious services. Such mandates violate the conscience rights and bodily integrity of vaccinated and unvaccinated persons alike because each person as a solemn and inherited right to assert their freedom to decline any unwanted medical treatment or procedure, including vaccination without fear of discrimination, movement restrictions, punishment or reprisal.

Impact Statement:

It is hard to put into words how much the government and law enforcement have traumatized faithful God-fearing Christians who sought to worship, make free medical choices based on informed consent, and live in freedom over the past two years.

Because of the ongoing pressure and coercion many churches are completely divided and have lost attendance. Unvaccinated people are not permitted to fly or use rail to this very day. They feel trapped and bullied into being 2nd class citizens. Christian children give special attention when police drive by. Christian families fear a knock at the door. More and more individuals in the community are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, loss of sleep, alcohol and drug dependency, and fear.

I deeply respect the law, but I remain concerned by the hasty, arbitrary, and severe actions of the Ontario Government and the Canadian Government. I stand with committee today to urge that Canada be added to the Religious Freedom Special Watch List because I am committed to the local church’s important Christian function in the community: to worship God, to disciple Christians, to give witness to Christ’s commands publicly, and to be a redemptive voice calling out for justice and morality in Canada. In our current unprecedented situation, as so many social grievances accumulate, as personal consciences are violated, and as personal health choices are being mandated without consent, it is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in human ideas and plans. We have ministered to those coming to our services by reading scripture, singing joyfully and victoriously to God, bearing one another’s burdens, and meditating on Christ — the Word, the Power, and the Wisdom of God.